

Boys Don't Learn!!!

by Ewa Charkiewicz

*Notes on Michel Hardt and Antonio Negri's 2004
"Multitude, War and Democracy in the Age of Empire"*

In their book-size essay of 2000, Hardt and Negri discussed the new world order, the Empire, which they defined as the emerging form of sovereign power that governs economic, cultural and political relations in the globalised world. In this interesting and thought-provoking essay, the two authors played around with concepts from Marxist and Foucault studies.

Their new joint book, "Multitude" is an attempt to delineate oppositions and resistances to the Empire. While the first book was a set of ideas to talk over with others, and hence its effects were innocent, the new book names, maps and defines the contours of resistance. Behind the book is a dangerous dream, a promise to provide a comprehensive view on contemporary forms of resistance. Inevitably, it excludes other courses of actions that are "invisible" to the authors. Every discourse shapes its own object by making boundaries and excluding what does not belong to its territory. Since the Multitude book is the attempt to name and hence to produce

a particular account of the oppositional or resistance movements to the Empire, it intervenes in the movement, and gives it a specific shape. Donna Haraway warned that bird's-eye (or god-like) views lent themselves to strategies of control. My problems with the methods deployed in the book to produce a particular account of Multitude as Resistance to the Empire are as follows:

1. Totalising, top-down approach. The Empire, and not the diverse people's lives are the drawing board into which the description of resistances is fitted in. The method that H&N employ is a discourse on discourse. Illustrations of resistances are used in an instrumental manner, to prove the point of the authors, rather than as an archive from which resistances can be studied.
2. Concepts such as multitude, swarms, and networks, are born by the Empire. Rand Corporation and Defense University conceptualised the enemy in this manner (as swarm or network) a decade ago. The

founding reference for multitude is Hobbes; the temporality is the wake of modernity, and not the current realities of the resistance movements, which have profoundly transformed.

3. Boys talk to boys. Plenty of references to Moses, Elijah, Machiavelli, Smith, Marx, Adorno, Becker, Tobin, etc., but very very few women mentioned: Mary Shelley, Maggie Thatcher, Hannah Arendt, Saskia Sassen (one selective reference on denationalisation but not to her seminal work on the new role of financial capital). One feminist reference in the whole book—only to Judith Butler; selective reference on the performance of gender. One more feminist woman, Rosa Luxembourg is mentioned in a footnote. The gender ratio in references in *Multitude* is 1 woman to circa 100 guys. From this point of view, Hardt and Negri have more in common with Larry Summers than with Angela Davis.
4. Ecology appears as a grievance, and not as an alternative worldview and alternative mode of the organisation of production and consumption. Neither feminism nor ecology appears as new social critiques (this is related to my point

on fixation on production and labour).

5. Questionable is the hypothesis on resistance movements taking the form of network as an isomorphic effects of the global re-organisation of production into networked order. It can be argued that in the age of Network, small, mobile, media savvy, post-disciplinary politico-intellectuals think tanks can play a liberatory, disruptive and transformative role better or as well as organisations taking the networked form. (This is not an argument in favor of abandoning networks; rather it is to oppose the colonisation of political imaginations by the network form). Besides, following 9/11, the Empire has an unprecedented centralising grip, from which it controls the networks, and the intersection points. In his latest book, Fukuyama claims bureaucracy is more important than democracy.
6. Ignored are the effects of how resistance(s) and Empire are co-produced and submerged within the same fields of power relations. The example of gender mainstreaming or ecological modernisation shows how issues, organisations, ways of resisting are incorporated and co-defined and co-produce the "Empire." Examples: calculative ecology and calculative equity, negotiation as a dominant market form of resistance, subtle repositioning of oppositional discourses, e.g., from justice and fair/alternative organisation of society to individual rights and calculative equity. In the process, social movements are re-customised as

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- interest groups. H&N mention the fields of power relations, and how resistance is co-producing power, but do not think through conclusions on the effects of these processes on “multitude.” The effect is they assume an immaculate birth of multitude. Here one can think of messianic continuity between the Christ the Saviour and Redeemer, the revolutionary class, and the multitude.
7. Lines of flight (Deleuze) from material and real to virtual ignored, and hence they blindly move along these lines.
 8. Fixation on labour and production (consumption as domain of labours of affect, biopolitical interventions and capital accumulation is ignored). Capital does not need workers to the extent it did before; states do not need that many soldiers to conduct wars; not even mothers are needed... consumers as source of finance are object of biopolitical interventions. Given that the new social contract is between the states and corporations, and states nurture corporate profit making capacities rather than lives of populations, what is protected is not populations, not even private property but the profitmaking capacities....
 9. Ignored are the new forms of accumulation of value, new virtual financial products and ways of generating rent profits in the post-fordist modes of accumulation, which enhance the extraction of human energy from some, but make others redundant.
 10. Military vital complex: the concept is barely sketched. Here I would beg for a Deleuzian approach and conception of resistance from within the war machine.
 11. Inequalities and conflicts within Multitude are ignored. In the sweeping re-conceptualisation of revolutionary into bricoleur, differences and conflict are swept under the carpet.
 12. Romanticisation of the poor by two compassionate blokes...but no analysis on how poverty and the unwanted people (human waste as called by Bauman) are produced.
 13. War on livelihoods (e.g., resource wars such as in the Democratic Congo or Niger Delta, or to a large extent, the resource control dimensions of the Iraq war) ignored. In Poland, in transition from communism to neo-liberalism, 2 million jobs “disappeared.” The economic activity rate is circa 50%. People’s livelihoods are taken away from them, resource bases shrink while no new means of livelihoods are made possible. (Re: Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Chapter 5 on vital massacres, life slaughter in the name of life necessity; nowadays, life slaughter is taking a crude form, in the name of corporate growth, consumption, and capital multiplication.)
 14. The phenomenon of human waste, people whom the Empire does not need any more to multiply the financial capital is ignored. This is a fundamental flaw of the book. The alternatives outlined in the book (e.g.,

Tobin tax) have nothing to offer to the “human waste.” ANY SERIOUS AND RESPONSIBLE DISCUSSION OF RESISTANCE SHOULD BE ABOUT PROVIDING ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOODS. Alternative modes of accumulation of capital and alternative biopolitics are not discussed in the book. H & N have an interesting critique of the failure of the socialist (Soviet) state, but they do not apply any critique to themselves; they assume an immaculate state of their Multitude project. This is the effect of the assumption that the Multitude and the Empire are in a binary opposition. Resistance is delineated from the Empire. Resistance is often about keeping life, maintaining the state of living. This kind of resistance is invisible in the Multitude book.

15. They hardly talk about the new forms of multiplication of capital. In Foucault’s hypothesis, biopolitics was a useful invention to adjust bodies to the forms of accumulation of capital... This biopower was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not be possible without controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and adjustment of the phenomenon of population to the economic processes. But this was not all it required; it also needed the growth of both these factors, their reinforcement as well as their availability and docility; it had to have methods of power capable of optimising forces, aptitudes, and life in general without making them at the same time difficult to govern (HoS Penguin edition, 1978: 141).
16. The use of biopower in both books is obsolete, as it does not address how the technologies of biopower (or biopolitics) is transformed, and how it is now accompanied by necropolitics, politics of control and regulation of death, and to policing the life/death boundaries (necropolitics is a generative model of power to deal with all kinds of human waste and redundant people; see Agamben, on Refugees, the archetypal homo sacer, the one who can be killed with impunity or Mbembe on SAPs). Besides, in Foucault’s take, biopolitics was invented to control multitude, to get to know it, to make it manageable, to regulate. Hence a more fine-tuned analytic of biopolitical production would have shed a different light on resistance.
17. Global parliament ideas highly naïve; again the authors think of multitude as return to Eden; resistance reborn as multitude by immaculate politico-intellectual daddies.
18. Martyrdom as act of love is bullshit! Boys brought up to patriotic ideas refuse their content but do not think through the normalisation of sacrifice. They are socialised to sacrifice for the nation or revolution. Deconstruction of masculinity, how guys (and gender relations) are produced, would have made a far more interesting book.

19. The annoying thing is how they use bits and pieces of other people's work, e.g., Foucault or Sassen to fit these bits into their own conceptualisations but ignore the comprehensive outcomes and analytics developed by the authors they selectively use.

20 When resistance as multitude becomes the language game, the materiality, the sweat and tears, the lost battles, the pain are ignored or made into a monument. But the search for new language to talk of resistance is important. The problem is how and by whom resistance is analysed and named... The process should be more inclusive rather than a brainchild of two guys.

Altogether I think the authors have fallen prey to their own dream of leadership, edenic purity, unity and coherence. I think the better way to theorise on resistances is to map practices, contradictions, paradoxes, fault lines between dreams and actions, to explore silences.

Interesting points in the book

1. Torture as a form of control. Yes, but one would also see it in the larger context of how dealing with pain, accepting suffering, taking pain, and living through pain is institutionalised in various technologies of the self and regulatory ideals, such as Rambo movies, gym body building and diet

regimens, etc. These offer adjustments to the intensified pace of work and highly competitive work environment. (So do the meditative techniques and other relaxation exercises).

2. The proposal to create new *tableau economique* is very interesting. Some time ago, I met an American woman who began her Ph.D. tracing where does the big global money go to. In her preliminary assessment, it is spent on investments in nanotechnology and space research, which further contribute to making bodies (and multitude) redundant. A *tableau economic* for Poland would be a powerful projectile against the ex-coms, neo-libs and national Catholics.

3. The idea about genealogy of resistances is very interesting; only it is executed in a macro manner. Before Foucault took on his inquiry into the organization of power at macro level (biopolitics, governmentality), he investigated the microphysics of power and showed the relationship between the two. H&N conducted their research on the macro level alone.

I could find a couple more interesting points but I am really pissed off at the two Leftie boys who are impregnable to feminist critiques...as if we did not exist. In effect, this *Multitude* book is more about their resistance games against the daddy Bush et al. than about the new resistance movements.